Natural Beauty

by Brigitte Carnochan

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Commentary

Most photographs are rectangles or squares. Elsewhere I've discussed the round and oval. Here's an example of a nondescript shape — which fortunately seems so perfectly to fit the subject matter. That's the thing about "breaking the rules" — whenever we do so, we'd better have a darn good reason and it had better fit the subject matter and the artistic expression we are attempting. In this case, there is harmony between the soft brush strokes of emulsion that defined the edges, the delicate tonalities and soft contrast of the rendition, as well as the physically soft petals of these lovely blossoms. The treatment makes aesthetic sense and doesn't feel forced.

But what about this white line running down the vertical center of the photograph, dividing the two blossoms with the photograph's only hard edge? Why did Carnochan think this was an important element in the composition? Is it saying something about a split? We don't know her intent, so we're left to ask these questions on our own. In fact, this particular example is a little different from most of the other images in this portfolio. The others have white break lines dividing the image into *three* sections.

Perhaps the issue of greater importance best illustrated with this image is the entire question of what is referred to in the graphics world as "layout and design." Where we photographers used to be limited to the rectangle or square image — and stretched our habits considerably to make a round one — we now have seemingly unlimited possibilities. Edges, textures, graphic elements, non-photographic elements, text, multiple images, grids and montage, handwork, computer work, and almost anything we can imagine is now possible. The world of photography has grown up and, at least for some of us, we have embarked on a very exciting new age. If we can imagine it, we can probably produce it.

It's not that our vocabulary has expanded; it's that we have entirely new languages at our disposal. Nothing says we *have* to move beyond the rectangle and square, but isn't it exhilarating that we *can*, fairly easily, if we want to!

Which brings us to the question of graphic design *skills and training*. I know few photographers who arrived at photography through the world graphic arts and design. Lots of photographers came to photography from the world of music, some from painting, most with almost no background in art whatsoever. It presents us with one of the greatest challenges that previous generations of photographers never had to face: how do we choose to integrate *graphic arts* and *camera arts*? Beyond traditional camera and printing skills, what new skills should we learn? Edward Weston is still a photographic hero, but now so is David Hockney. What an incredibly exciting time to be a photographer!